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## Building envisioned to renew section of St. Paul's East Side

The city would put a library branch and rec center under the same roof as a church and a funeral home, according to plans for a \$35 million campus at Payne and Maryland avenues.

By CHRIS HAVENS, Star Tribune

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A plan for a community megacenter on St. Paul's East Side would put a library branch, city recreation center, church and funeral home under the same roof.

The building and outdoor campus would take up about 4.5 acres near the corner of Payne and Maryland avenues.

Over the next two months, more detailed designs will come into focus, but a \$35 million campus is already outlined with spaces for recreation, education, celebration, worship and more. Planners say that it might be the first facility of its kind -- mixing government nonprofit and private entities -- and that it will save money for all involved.

They see it as a community asset that will better serve current residents, attract new folks to the area and invite business investment.

"The East Side needs a real shot in the arm," said Jim Bradshaw, owner of the funeral home.


Scores of jobs disappeared from the East Side over recent decades. Foreclosures and crime hit hard. More than 300 buildings sit vacant near the Payne-Maryland site.

It's always been an immigrant toehold, and new folks from Africa, Asia and South and Latin American continue to move in. About 20 percent of the area's population of 27,700 is children from age 5 to 14, according to city statistics.

The city has committed \$14 million, the majority from bonds. The private partners, Arlington Hills Lutheran Church and Bradshaw Funeral and Cremation Services, will begin raising their share soon. Merrick Community Services, a social services agency, probably will rent space in the building.

Planners stress that no public money will go to the church and that a clear line between it

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and the city will exist. The city operations will probably be on the other end of the building from the church.

Construction is likely to start in 2011 and end in 2012.

The cinder-block Arlington Hills rec center has poor energy efficiency, no room for meeting space and doesn't offer much programming for seniors. The number of visitors to the rec center increased from 32,000 in 2006 to 39,000 in 2009.

The Arlington Hills library is cramped and overcrowded. The number of visitors to the branch jumped from 128,000 in 2006 to 152,000 in 2009.

The church offers English language classes, among other programs, but would like to do more. It can't, though, without costly building upgrades.

Bradshaw Funeral and Cremation Services is in an outmoded building in a rapidly changing industry.

There's a fair amount of resident support. A January meeting brought in 100 people.


Mayor Chris Coleman said it's an example of

how the city needs to think: build partnerships and quality buildings that provide better services.

"You can't say 'Buy a house' in a neighborhood that has no services or prospects," he said. "So you if ask people to move in, you have to be able to show that the city is willing to invest in it."

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